



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR
Amanda M. Dewey

COUNCIL MEMBERS
Jodie A. Kulpa-Eddy (Mayor Pro Tem)
Christopher S. Brittan Powell
Jason W. Papanikolas
Ethan D. Sweep

Town Meeting Minutes July 8, 2020 | 7:00 pm

This meeting was held by videoconference due to the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency, which prohibits large gatherings and advises Marylanders to remain socially distant. The meeting was broadcast on Berwyn Heights cable TV channels and streamed on the Town website. Residents were given the opportunity to comment by telephone and email.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m. Present were Mayor Amanda Dewey, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Councilmembers (CMs) Chris Brittan-Powell, and Ethan Sweep. CM Jason Papanikolas had an excused absence. Also present were Town Manager (TM) Maria Broadbent, Interim Town Manager Laura Allen, Treasurer Michelle Rodriguez, Town Clerk Kerstin Harper, Lieutenant Daniel Unger, Code Director Hollyce Goodwin, Public Works Clerk Rosalie Jones, and Green Team Chair Jeff Knutson and Historical Committee Chair Richard Ahrens.

1. Approval of the Agenda

MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved, and CM Sweep seconded to approve the agenda. MPT Kulpa-Eddy noted that two different versions of the agenda are posted on the Town website; the Granicus version is the correct one to use. The agenda was approved 4 to 0.

2. Approval of Minutes

CM Sweep moved, and MPT Kulpa-Eddy seconded to approve the June 10 Town meeting minutes. The motion passed 4 to 0. CM Brittan-Powell moved, and MPT Kulpa-Eddy seconded to approve the June 15 worksession minutes. The motion passed 4 to 0.

3. Mayor's Report

CM Dewey reported that Monday's worksession was cancelled for lack of a quorum. Two Councilmembers were unable to access the virtual meeting due to power outages caused by a thunderstorm. The Council attended this year's virtual summer conference of the Maryland Municipal League (MML) last week, which will be discussed later on the agenda. Many private fireworks were set off during the 4th of July weekend in and around Berwyn Heights. Residents are reminded that fireworks are illegal to use in Berwyn Heights and in Prince George's County.

CM Dewey continued that Prince George's County is doing well with respect to containing the coronavirus and now has the second lowest infection rate in Maryland. However, everyone is encouraged to continue to practice social distancing and wear masks in public. The Town continues to operate in a manner that seeks to minimize social interaction, keeping the Town Hall closed to the public, responding to inquiries by phone or email, and meeting virtually. Town businesses have reopened with County reopenings and Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) will announce plans for reopening schools sometime in mid-July.

Mayor Dewey concluded relating her experience with getting tested for COVID-19 at a pop-up testing site in Hyattsville. The process was quick and easy and provided results within 30 hours of the test. Residents need not hesitate to get tested if they think they might be infected.

4. Department Reports

Mayor Dewey asked for a motion to receive all department reports for the record. CM Sweep so moved. CM Brittan Powell seconded. The motion passed 4 to 0.

Administration: TM Broadbent announced that Berwyn Heights will start a food scraps composting program, managed by a local vendor, *Compost Crew*, around July 20. Details will be published on the website and social media. She is planning to reopen Pop's Park following the reopening of Park & Planning playgrounds but not before posting signs advising patrons of COVID-19 ground rules. The Town will not be disinfecting equipment and use will be at your own risk.

CM Brittan-Powell questioned whether the playground should be opened as children might spread the virus contracted at the playground to older family members or friends. TM Broadbent, Mayor Dewey and CM Sweep replied that it should be relatively safe to follow in the footsteps of Park & Planning, which likely consulted with health experts before opening their playgrounds and that the risk of outdoor spread is low. Additionally, it may be safer for playground users to spread out to different playgrounds instead of flocking to one.

Mike Attick, 62nd Avenue, commented he thinks it is not a good idea to reopen Pops Park since the Town might be held liable for any spread of the virus. Mayor Dewey suggested going forward with procuring the safety signage as planned and discussing the decision further at the July 20 worksession.

Treasurer's Report: MPT Kulpa-Eddy asked whether the year-end financial report reflects all bills having been paid. TM Broadbent replied that some bills are still outstanding and may not be paid until after the fiscal year ends. Treasurer Rodriguez said she has made every effort get the departments to turn in their invoices for payment but there will be some late payments. Overall staff have done a good job keeping track of their budget and expenses.

Code Compliance: CM Brittan Powell said he is in the process of getting up to speed on Code enforcement matters and plans to meet with staff to learn how the Department operates. Judging by the Code Director's monthly report, there have not been any major issues.

In response to questions, Director Goodwin and TM Broadbent said that Code staff works mostly from home but will come out regularly to check on properties and follow up on any complaints. Citations are issued for clean lot and other violations. Rental licenses are being renewed upon payment, but no inspections of rental homes' interior are currently performed. A new rental property was fined for renting without a license and the fine was paid.

Parks, Recreation, Education & Civic Affairs: MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported that PGCPs has resumed its 'grab and go' breakfast and lunch program for students, served Monday through Thursday 10:00 am to noon at Berwyn Heights Elementary School. Park & Planning has reopened their playgrounds to the public with restrictions, e.g. no groups larger than 10, keeping a distance and wearing masks. Park & Planning will continue its College Park airport tree trimming and removal program over the next weeks to comply with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) safety regulations. New trees will be planted throughout College Park to compensate for the tree removals.

Mayor Dewey added that the program was substantially modified based on numerous citizen comments and complaints, and no additional removals are planned. Tree work near the railroad underpass at Lake Artemesia may have been part of this project or a stream restoration project.

In Town organization news, the Karate Club meets virtually via Zoom twice a week. Residents interested in joining should contact Theresa Beck at beck_theresa@yahoo.com. Other Town organization updates will be provided under Committee Reports.

Public Works: CM Sweep thanked Public Works and BHPD for working late to help secure the street where a tree came down during Monday's lightning storm. Public Works' is using the new trash truck which has a recycling info graphic on its side. He has received some complaints about trash not being picked up and explained that Public Works is somewhat short staffed at the moment. Residents, whose trash bins were missed, should call or email Public Works so they can return to collect it.

CM Sweep said the Town has signed up with a local vendor to initiate a food scrap composting program. A container will be set up in the back of the Town Center where residents can drop off their food scraps. Compostable bags will be provided at that location. Mayor Dewey and TM Broadbent added that residents may sign up and pay individually for the commercial compost service, which includes household bins and curbside collection. A small amount of finished compost will be provided to Town for use in gardening.

Public Safety: Mayor Dewey thanked BHPD for its first virtual Coffee with Cops last week. A number of residents tuned in and good conversations were had. As usual, residents are reminded not leave their car doors unlocked as thefts from vehicles continue to be the most prevalent crime in the Town.

In response to CM Sweep, Lt. Unger said that BHPD has an open investigation into shots being fired in the area of Natasha Drive on the 4th of July. No one was injured but shell casings were found the following day. Detective Krouse is talking to neighbors and welcomes help from anyone with information about the incident.

5. Committee Reports

Education Advisory Committee: MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported she participated in the last BHEAC meeting, where the reopening of schools in the fall was the focus of discussion. PGCPs has not released a final plan but some distance learning may be part of the mix. The BHEAC wants to help assist students who have had difficulty accessing the distance learning system.

Green Team: Green Team facilitator Jeff Knutson gave the report. The Green Team has suspended monthly Town cleanups but encourages residents to pick up trash individually. The Green Team can provide trash pickers to volunteers. Eight Trees of Distinction have been recognized and been posted online. The Green Team/ Shade Tree Board also reviewed applications from residents to have a tree planted on their property, a program launched by the Town to build up the tree canopy.

The Green Team worked on becoming recertified for the Sustainable Maryland program, which added some new projects. It includes a carbon footprint study that was submitted with the application. Notification about recertification is expected by October after two rounds of review. The Green Team also launched a summer Green Champions program that seeks to raise environmental awareness among students, while giving them something to do. The community garden is in good shape, thanks in part to Diana Agonoy's coordination. All plots are occupied, and Public Works is helping with maintenance.

There ensued discussion about a potential trash problem at Lake Artemesia due to the increased use of the park, legacy septic systems in the Town and mechanisms to capture trash washed into Indian Creek from stormwater drains during heavy rains. The Green Team may take all this up as part of focusing on improving water quality in the Anacostia watershed for the next Sustainable Maryland recertification.

Historical Committee: Historical Committee Chair Richard Ahrens gave a report. He said the Committee has not met since February due to the coronavirus lockdown. An attempt to hold a virtual meeting in April failed but a new meeting is scheduled for July 22. On the agenda are the possible participation in a *National Night In* parade, as well as a virtual tour of historic homes. The Committee will also discuss how to hold its election of officers that normally takes place in September.

Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness: NW/EP Chair Mike Attick called by telephone. He said the Committee has not met since March and is trying to determine when and how they can next meet.

Recreation Council: MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported the Recreation Council's virtual summer concert series continues with the Jan Knutson Duo on July 16, 7 p.m. and the Russell Wilson-Susan Jones Duo on July 30, 7 p.m. The concerts can be watched on YouTube (<https://bit.ly/bhrecyoutube>) or on BHTV Comcast 71 or FiOS 12. The Recreation Council and BHPD are planning a National Night-In parade for August 4. Any Town organization or resident interested in participating should contact Recreation Council President Susan Jones or BHPD Clerk Mercy Muralles. The BHPD food drive continues until 5:00 pm on July 18, and donations can be dropped off at the Police station during business hours.

6. Unfinished Business

MML Conference Recap: Councilmembers shared their experiences from this year's virtual MML conference. MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported that she attended sessions on employment issues and the 2020 Census, a large cities population forum, and a cabinet secretary chat on transportation. She was hoping to talk to them about repair work on Route 193 and 201 but was advised to talk to the district engineer. TM Broadbent offered to follow up.

Mayor Dewey attended a workshop on climate resilience, which focused on stormwater and flooding, on the Open Meetings Act (OMA), on COVID-19 and its impact on revenues as well as some related scams. She attended chats with the Secretaries of the Environment and of Community Development that included discussions of COVID-19 and homelessness.

CM Sweep attended several sessions required for earning a Certificate from the Academy for Excellence in Local Governance. The Open Meetings Act session was interesting because it discussed proper notification of virtual meetings.

CM Brittan Powell enjoyed attending his first MML conference and was impressed with the many knowledgeable and connected officials that were truly interested in helping the local officials.

7. New Business

Resolution 10-2020 - Appointment of Interim Town Manager: Mayor Dewey announced that TM Broadbent has accepted a new position in Massachusetts and submitted her resignation. On behalf of the Council she thanked TM Broadbent for her service to the Town and wished her all the best. The search for a new Town Manager is expected to take 3-4 months, for which period an Interim Town Manager will be appointed.

TM Broadbent thanked all Councilmembers for the opportunity to work with them. She thinks this Council worked well together and got a lot done. Major accomplishments include establishing a set of financial controls and transparency measures that move the Town forward. Working for Berwyn Heights in Prince George's County was a way for her to give back to the place where she grew up. Her new job in Wellfleet on Cape Cod will allow her to spend more time with family.

TM Broadbent expressed her gratitude that Laura Allen accepted the position of Interim Town Manager, which will help ensure the progress that has been made continues. Ms. Allen last served as the Treasurer for the City of Greenbelt and will work under similar arrangements as Berwyn Heights' previous Interim Town Manager, Mike McLaughlin, which is reflected in the agreement the Council plans to adopt tonight.

Mayor Dewey said that Ms. Allen will begin her employment on July 27 to coordinate the transition with TM Broadbent, and on August 4 will be here full time. Mayor Dewey said she is looking forward to working with Ms. Allen and asked her to introduce herself.

Ms. Allen said she is originally from Easton, MD, spent much of her career as a city manager in California, and returned to Maryland to work as Town Administrator in Berlin until 2019. Most recently, she held the position of City Treasurer for Greenbelt and now looks forward to working for Berwyn Heights.

Councilmembers thanked TM Broadbent for her service and lending her professional expertise to helping the Council to achieve their goals. They welcomed Laura Allen saying that her strong background in financial management will be needed to get through the difficulties caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Clerk Harper read the Resolution. CM Sweep moved to adopt it. MPT Kulpa-Eddy seconded. She suggested that notices of the appointment be posted on the Town Office front door. The motion passed 4 to 0.

Prince George's County Charter Amendment regarding Real Property Tax: Mayor Dewey explained the Prince George's County Council is proposing a Charter Amendment to be placed on the ballot in the November election that would change the deadline by which the County sets the Homestead Tax Credit (HTC) percentage and remove the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as the basis for a cap for the Homestead Tax Credit percentage. The HTC is a state program that limits annual increases in the taxable assessed value of a homeowner's principal residence to 10% or less per year over a 3-year assessment period for homeowners enrolled in the program. In 1997 Prince George's County imposed a cap of the CPI or 5% (whichever is less) on increases in assessed value. The proposed legislation removes this cap and allows increases up to 10%.

In discussion, MPT Kulpa-Eddy said there does not seem to be enough time for the Council to send a joint letter commenting on the legislation, which is coming up for a vote by the County Council on July 21. She suggested that Councilmembers and residents, comment in individual letters to their representatives. Further, she does not understand why this legislation is being brought up now. Raising the HTC cap from 5% to 10% is likely to result in higher property taxes paid by County residents, many of whom are already financially strapped due to COVID-19 job losses.

Mayor Dewey noted that there will be two opportunities for residents to learn more about the issues and to comment during a College Park forum tonight at which County Councilmembers Glaros and

Dernoga will debate and a Glaros Thought Series forum on July 13. Tonight's Town Meeting agenda package also contains a lot of good information, including a presentation from 3 County Councilmembers who are opposed to the measure and a written summary from Councilmember Glaros who supports the measure.

Mayor Dewey commented that while she has remaining questions, she believes the proposal has merits. For example, she has seen evidence that the 5% HTC cap has in fact contributed to a higher real property tax rate in this County. Further, she believes the CPI may not be a useful a standard to measure inflation as it used to be because the composition of household spending has changed over time but is not reflected in the CPI.

Four Cities Agenda (added item): CM Dewey requested the Council to propose agenda items for the July 22 Four Cities meeting that will be hosted (virtually) by Berwyn Heights. The following items were proposed: School re-opening in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; PGCPS funding for LGBTQ training; and policing reform initiatives. The Town will also invite School Board Representative Joshua Thomas to discuss plans for the upcoming school year.

8. Citizen Discussion

Mike Attick commented that Prince George's County has twice attempted to repeal the HTC cap and failed. He suggested using the street sweeper to vacuum up litter that is captured by any kind of device the Town might install at stormwater outfalls. He also expressed his regrets about TM Broadbent's departure.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk